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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 002256

SIPDIS

NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR JENDAYI FRAZER  
LONDON FOR CGURNEY  
NAIROBI FOR PFLAUMER  
PARIS FOR NEARY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/08/2012

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [ZI](#)

SUBJECT: MEETING WITH EDDISON ZVOBGO

REF: A. A) HARARE 2193

[B](#). B) HARARE 1992

Classified By: Political Officer Kimberly Jemison. Reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: In an October 7 meeting, Eddison Zvobgo, provided insight into the upcoming Insiza by-election and the treason case against Morgan Tsvangirai. He also had many interesting things to say about the food situation and its likely affect on rural support for ZANU-PF. Zvobgo said ZANU-PF would win the Insiza by-election and that the treason case against Morgan Tsvangirai would be dismissed. Zvobgo also said the deteriorating food situation, particularly in the rural areas, would erode ZANU-PF support as deaths increase. End Summary.

#### Food Crisis Dominates

[1](#)2. (C) On October 7, Amb and Poloff met with Dr. Eddison Zvobgo, an elder statesman in the ruling party who has been estranged from President Mugabe since 2000, and his daughter Karina. Zvobgo lamented the fact that there was no food in his province of Masvingo and that there were increasing signs of malnutrition among the population--confirming similar assessments of the food situation we made in Matabeleland North and South and Manicaland during our pre-rural council election tours (reftel A). Zvobgo said he thought there would be starvation deaths by the end of October.

[1](#)3. (C) Zvobgo said that increasing levels of starvation and deaths in the rural areas would eventually weaken the ZANU-PF base. He also expressed concerns about urban riots because, unlike the rural population, the urban population will not suffer silently. Zvobgo did reiterate his claim during a previous conversation with Polchief and Poloff (See reftel B) that ZANU-PF supporters are bearing the brunt of food shortages, since they are concentrated in rural districts. Both he and his daughter seemed to think MDC supporters who are concentrated in urban areas are in much better shape.

[1](#)4. (C) The Ambassador asked whether food was being used as a weapon as it had been in Matabeleland during the early 1980s. Zvobgo replied that food has been and still is being used as a weapon, particularly in Masvingo, southern Manicaland, and Matabeleland--all areas that did not fully support ZANU-PF in the presidential elections. Zvobgo said Mashonaland Central is getting the most food because the province voted most strongly for ZANU-PF in the presidential election. NOTE: The Zimbabwe Election Support Network reported that Mugabe received 84 percent of all votes cast in Mashonaland Central while in Masvingo and Midlands provinces he received 70 and 63 percent, respectively. END NOTE.

[1](#)5. (C) The Ambassador also pointed out the length of time it took to get the Memorandum of Understanding with WFP on food imports signed and he wondered if certain elements within the Cabinet did not want international food assistance. Zvobgo did not appear surprised at the length of time it took to get the MOU signed. He did say that the party elite did not have a problem with international aid per se but with the lack of control ZANU-PF would have over distribution.

[1](#)6. (C) Zvobgo and Karina gave anecdotal evidence about the depth of the food crisis. Karina said she would bring corn meal to Harare from Masvingo occasionally to the nurses she works with because they cannot find any corn meal. They have the money for purchase but there is little or no corn meal available in Harare. Zvobgo said that a 50-kg bag of corn was selling for a minimum of 1300 Zimbabwe dollars, 1.5 times the official controlled price, and some businessmen were selling it for 1700.

#### PARLIAMENTARY BY-ELECTIONS

[1](#)7. (C) Asked about the upcoming October 26-27 by-election to replace a recently deceased MDC MP from Insiza constituency, Zvobgo thought that ZANU-PF would win because of shenanigans.

Zvobgo said the vote would be evenly split even though the Matabeleland South constituency is heavily pro-MDC and the MDC ought to win in a free and fair process.

18. (C) The Ambassador brought to Zvobgo,s attention that there were probably some within ZANU-PF who were trying to regain the party's two-thirds majority (100 votes) in Parliament before the 2005 elections in order to have enough votes to change the constitution. Zvobgo did not seem to think this possible because ZANU-PF would have to get rid of seven MDC MPs and then win all seven Parliamentary by-elections.

TSVANGIRAI TREASON CASE LIKELY TO BE DISMISSED

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19. (C) Zvobgo thought the treason case against MDC President Morgan Tsvangirai, scheduled for November 11, would be dismissed because of the inadmissibility of the implicating videotape. According to Zvobgo, MDC attorneys finally received the state,s evidence against Tsvangirai last week. Among the papers was the tape, which Zvobgo claimed had been heavily edited to show only the most harmful statements. Even then it was often inaudible. Zvobgo thought the questionable tape and the lack of credibility of the state's chief witness, Ari Ben-Menashe, would compel the judge to dismiss the case before it really starts based on the absence of a reasonable suspicion of guilt. NOTE: Zimbabwe law dictates that (oral) testimony be incontrovertible and in its totality. END NOTE.

110. (C) Zvobgo reiterated his view that even Zimbabwe's altered judicial system could not convict an innocent person of a serious crime. However, he was concerned that the case might not be dismissed immediately if one of the new, inexperienced judges hears the case and it could drag on for 6-8 months before a final ruling to dismiss the case is issued. Zvobgo said he thought a protracted case would ruin Tsvangirai,s reputation and might damage the MDC.

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11. (C) COMMENT: While there is not much new in Zvobgo's views, he is always interesting as one of the few major figures who talks to both sides of the political divide. END COMMENT.  
SULLIVAN